

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Cohesion
2.	Date:	28th April, 2014
3.	Title:	2014/2015 Infrastructure and Corporate Initiatives Budget (ICIB) - Grant Aid for Community Legal Advice & Information Services (All Wards)
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate

5. Summary

The report seeks approval to renew Service Level Agreements with Kiverton Park Independent Advice Centre (KPIAC), Rotherham Diversity Forum (RDF) Immigration Project, and Giving Real Opportunities to Women (GROW) to provide advice, information, and advocacy services for the 2014/15 financial year.

The three agencies were assessed as outside the scope of the current generalist welfare rights advice service commissioning exercise because they provide specialist services on a community of interest or place basis.

The agencies currently have one year Service Level Agreements in place that are due to end on 31st March 2014 and renewal will permit a continuation of the current provision pending a review of specialist advice services and an evaluation of the outcome of the generalist advice services commissioning exercise that is due to end in September 2014 when a new provider will be selected.

The agreements are funded through the delegated Infrastructure and Corporate Initiatives Budget (ICIB) under which the Cabinet Member, Communities and Cohesion, can award grants to local voluntary and community sector organisations that support initiatives aligned to the council's corporate priorities "helping people to improve their health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities within the borough" and "protecting our most vulnerable people and families, enabling them to maximise their independence".

6. Recommendations

6.1 To renew Service Level Agreements with the listed voluntary and community sector organisations for the 2014/15 financial year as set out in the report.

6.2 To review these services with a view to undertaking a commissioning exercise during the current financial year 2014/15.

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Independent Advice Services Grant Aid requirements

In line with the outcomes of the review of advice and information services which have previously been reported to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Cohesion Delegated Powers meeting Members are asked to approve the funding amounts for the projects listed below. These projects are outside of the scope of the current review and procurement process so funding is required to secure the continuation of the services for a further financial year to allow for the outcome of the review of general advice services.

7.1.1 Kiverton Park Independent Advice Centre (KPIAC) £27,698

KPIAC continues to perform against the existing service level agreement and performance highlights include: 1866 clients have been seen during the 2013/2014 financial year; 3213 enquiries being dealt with; verified gains and savings of £2.1 million have been made; and a new outreach session at Wickersley Library has also been launched in year. This has been achieved in the context of enquiries becoming more complex in their nature as on-going Welfare Reforms are rolled out. The focus of the work remains Benefits. Disability benefits such as Employment & Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance. Guidance is provided to clients through complex medical assessments, and also the appeals process which often involves submissions to the First Tier Tribunal.

The weekly outreach 'drop-in' sessions have continued at– Thurcroft Welfare Hall, Dinnington's Middleton Institute and the Edward Dunn Memorial Hall in Maltby. Additionally KPIAC volunteers attend at the Arnold Centre on a fortnightly basis to attend to appointments generated by the centre's own staff. The Maltby and Dinnington sessions are particularly well attended with about a quarter of the centre's clients being seen at these two centres – over 200 clients per centre. Uniquely home visits continue to be available and these are an integral part the contract. This ensures that elderly and/or housebound clients continue to have access to advice and guidance.

A service specification is in place to support the service level agreement to:

- Drop In sessions on Monday evening and Wednesday afternoons at Kiverton Park Community Library
- Provide outreach sessions on Tuesday and Thursdays at Dinnington Community Library, Edward Dunn Memorial Hall Maltby, The Arnold Centre, The Welfare Hall Thurcroft, and Wickerlsey Community Library.
- Provide a telephone service Monday to Friday.
- Provide home visits to older people and disabled people Monday to Friday.
- Maintain a website to provide self-help.
- Benefit 1800 claimants per annum.
- Provide a service in the Wards of Anston and Woodstetts, Dinnington, Hellaby, Rother Vale, Wickerlsey, Holderness, Maltby, Rotherham East, and Wales.
- Seek and secure match funding from Lloyds TSB, Bridging Fund Trust, and AST Fund (total £17,963).
- Provide a free service.
- Support the Council with its overall strategic priorities.

To note KPIAC is the only service covering the south of the borough.

7.1.2 Rotherham Diversity Forum (Immigration Project)

£11,564

The Immigration Project has been operated in the borough since 1992. The Project has consistently provided immigration and nationality advice to over 600 clients per annum and has maintained its accreditation with the Home Office to provide competent legal advice. This requires demonstration of key knowledge, skills and aptitude, and a commitment to continuous professional development.

Advice is provided on the immigration rules covering visitors, students, spouses/unmarried partners, immigration employment documents, and other related applications. Advice is also provided on nationality and citizenship under UK law including for naturalization as a British citizen and registration as a British citizen.

The offer caters for the population across the borough and most beneficiaries are from low income groups. The service is free at point of access and operates on an appointment and drop in basis. Referrals are made from statutory, voluntary and community organisations including local elected representatives. The use of bilingual volunteers and staff ensures the service continues to be accessible to the changing population of the borough.

A service specification is in place to support the service level agreement to:

- Provide drop in sessions Monday to Friday to Rotherham residents.
- Offer appointments Monday to Friday to Rotherham residents.
- Maintain Home Office accreditation at Level 1 to provide immigration and nationality advice.
- Maintain provision via town centre location (currently The Guardian Centre, Rotherham Market).
- Benefit 600 claimants per annum.
- Provide a free service.
- Provide a service for residents from all wards in the borough.
- Prepare and maintain the relevant paper work for referrals for appeals.
- Support the Council with its overall strategic priorities.

It should be noted that the Immigration Project will be the only voluntary sector immigration advisory service operating in the borough following the completion of the commissioning exercise of generalist advice as the focus of the new service will be welfare rights and benefits.

7.2 Additional conditions of funding to be included in all specifications for VCS organisations providing advice and information services funded via ICIB.

The Council in consultation with Advice in Rotherham (AiR) the umbrella group for independent advice agencies in Rotherham have agreed to the following for inclusion in service specifications as conditions of award of grant aid

▪ AiR Membership

To be a member of AiR and deliver advice within the new model of advice for Rotherham

▪ Cross agency referral capability – Nellbooker

Each partner will sign up and actively use Nellbooker the online booking and referral system to facilitate timely and accurate cross agency referrals thus improving the journey of the client.

▪ **Common Client Monitoring**

Funded agencies must be able to provide the council with regular information relating to client numbers, outcomes, equal opportunities etc. Information must be provided on time and in a form that is complete, clear and accurate. This requirement is essential to the whole process. The common counting system ensures that all data reported will link to show a true picture of need and delivery across Rotherham

▪ **Minimum threshold for Quality Assurance**

A minimum threshold for quality assurance is required – all agencies to be members of a recognised quality assurance system.

▪ **Addressing disadvantage**

Contracted agencies must be concerned with addressing disadvantage. Primarily this will be achieved by offering advice services targeted at those in most need. It will also encompass 'social added value' by, for example, developing and training volunteers who are disadvantaged within the labour market so that, in the process of inputting their free time, they can improve their skills and employability.

▪ **Area of operation**

Prospective members must be operating in Rotherham - the organisation must have a base located in the borough.

7.3 Advocacy Services Grant Aid Requirements

Giving Real Opportunities to Women (GROW)

£24,104

GROW has been in operation for the last 24 years and provides support and advocacy services to vulnerable Rotherham women and their families. The core client group for which referrals are made are women who are not accessing specialist services - health (including preventive health screening, mental health, drugs and alcohol), benefits advice, domestic and/or sexual abuse.

The focus of the project is preventative work with women and their families delivered through one to one support in the clients own home leading to the production of a support plan. 383 women and their families (423 children) have been supported between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013.

The support plans develop coping strategies e.g. assertiveness, communication skills, confidence, decision making, problem solving with the aim of reducing the number of families that step up to complex or acute services. The service also supports families that are stepping down from acute services to sustain the transition

A service specification is in place to support the service level agreement to:

- Review Rotherham Women's Strategy and produce a revised version and action plan for approval by the Council and Rotherham Partnership.
- Re-establish Rotherham Women's Network with council officers and Elected Members, the local vcs, and statutory partners.
- Organise and facilitate International Womens Day 2015.

- Support 350 women and their families living with multiple issues by developing support plans that promote coping strategies to reduce demand for acute services, and also from stepping down from acute services to sustain the transition
- Receive referrals to support women and their families from all wards in the borough.
- Support the Council with its overall strategic priorities and specific priorities for CSE, Teenage Parent Care Pathways, and enabling women aged 50 years plus to move closer to the labour market.

8. Finance

As section 7 above.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

There will always be some risk associated with contracting with external organisations; this will continue to be managed through stronger commissioning, service level agreements and monitoring systems within the financial regulations of the authority.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Government intends to introduce a range of significant changes to the benefits system as part of its Welfare Reform programme which is primarily based around incentivising work take-up. This has led to an increase in demand for advice, information, and advocacy services and continued funding of the groups listed in this report will enable Rotherham citizens to access services at the point of need.

11. Background Papers

Minutes and reports to Cabinet Member (Communities and Inclusion) 8th March 2010.

Minutes and reports to Cabinet Member (Community Development, Equalities, and Young Peoples issues) 14th March 2011

Minutes and reports to Cabinet Member (Community Development, Equalities, and Young Peoples issues) 16th April 2012

Minutes and reports to Cabinet Member (Communities and Cohesion) 25th March 2013.

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